

A Study on Traditional Chinese Opera within the Semantic Field of Mandarin and Dialects

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Abstract. The future of opera has a long history. Dialect is the foundation of the personality of opera and the vitality of opera. In 2025, the popularity rate of Mandarin in China will reach 85%, which makes people choose Mandarin as the mainstream language when appreciating and creating art. This has an obvious impact on opera art. Therefore, the selection of Mandarin or dialect in the opera language becomes the key to solving the problem of opera revitalization. The research on opera from this perspective has problems such as inadequate understanding of the root causes of the decline and revitalization of opera, insufficient exploration of the development ideas of opera, and lack of universal solutions applicable to all genres. This paper uses research methods such as literature analysis from the fields of drama studies and linguistics and focuses on the interaction between the common laws and characteristics of the development of opera and the times, to discuss the problems of each protection and development plan of opera. Finally, it forms an overall understanding of the future of opera and gives specific ideas for the development of opera based on the present.

1 Introduction

The decline of opera has a long history. In the discussion of the reasons for the decline of opera, the decline of dialects under the promotion of Mandarin is an important factor. Unique personality is the life of art, and the disappearance of personality means the death of the art. Dialect is the most important artistic personality of opera — the foundation of singing and a significant part of opera personality.

Drama is the art of telling stories by singing and dancing. At present, there are more than 300 kinds of Chinese operas that can be traced. Almost all opera genres were local operas at the beginning of their birth. In the process of creating opera singing, that is, lyrics and music, dialects of the origin and dissemination areas of opera are fully combined, which makes the rhythm of pronunciation and speech flow when speaking in dialects have an important influence on the melody of opera singing. Traditional Chinese opera is an art form rooted in dialects, and the rhythm and tonal patterns of dialects have a significant impact on its music [1]. This influence makes the singing of opera inseparable from local dialects. When the singing style was established, it was important to "depend on the word and the tone", and in the process of singing, it was important to "correct the word and round the tone". In ancient

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China, geographical barriers and inconvenient transportation led to many dialects, so a variety of singing styles with their characteristics were formed. Based on these singing styles, different operas were formed. Therefore, singing is an important basis for distinguishing various opera genres in artistic expression. However, in the process of opera development, some operas can change their vocal styles according to different dialects, and even some operas can have several vocal styles at the same time. However the dialect used in each region of opera will not change. Therefore, dialect has become the most significant difference feature of each drama genre. The classification of Chinese traditional opera is primarily based on vocal styles and phonetics [2]. Thus we can see the important role of dialect in opera.

However, in China, the popularization rate of Mandarin has reached 80.72% so far, and the promotion policy has not stopped. As an important carrier of culture, the phonetic change of language will greatly affect literary and artistic creation. Nowadays, in the choice of language for literary and artistic creation including opera in China, Mandarin is becoming more and more mainstream. Under such a choice of language, many excellent traditional cultures have been preserved and developed, but it also makes the opera art based on dialect as its personality foundation faces severe difficulties. Coupled with the rapid change of the cultural environment in the era, people pay attention to the future of opera.

On the question of revitalizing opera, there are two main views: protection and development. That is the dispute between dialect and Mandarin in the opera language. Insisting on dialect is considered to be the life of all opera genres; getting close to Mandarin enhances the competitiveness of opera by embracing the times. Both of these views have irrefutable reasons, but in practice, they each face many problems. Use this to clarify the commonality of the development difficulties faced by traditional culture, such as opera, in today's era and the particularity of the reasons for the decline of opera. This paper starts from the semantic field of dialect and Mandarin and discusses the commonality and individuality of the problems in the development of opera. Only by clarifying these, can we have a more correct understanding of the current situation and future of opera, grasp the development direction of opera now and in the future, and give solutions for the development of opera.

2 Background

Nowadays, the contradiction in the choice of opera language is mainly reflected in the contradiction between the survival and development of opera. The reform of Mandarin in the opera language is at the expense of the individuality of each opera, and individuality is the artistic life of opera. Adhering to dialects and disconnecting from the trends of the times are not conducive to the development of opera.

The debate among scholars on the revitalization of traditional opera stems from the interweaving of the common laws of cultural development and the characteristics of the era. Culture is both historical and contemporary. Historically, the emergence, formation and development of culture always have certain laws. But at different times, culture is also influenced by the unique circumstances of the time. From this perspective, we will thoroughly sort out the origin and evolution of the problem of opera to recognize the root of the problem.

Culture is the reflection of the environment of the times, and cultural development should be based on the soil of the environment of the times. In terms of content, it reflects the characteristics of the times; in terms of form, it is recognized by the public; and it can constantly absorb the excellent achievements of other cultures. Such a culture will rise; conversely, the culture that lags behind the times and is not recognized by the public will decline and become niche.

The drama arose from the law of cultural development. The personality of the opera--dialect and singing style also originate from this. In ancient China, geographical barriers and

isolation led to many dialects and language barriers. To be understood by the local people, opera was created based on dialects, so that each opera has its characteristics. At the same time, to further gain public recognition, opera will absorb the local unique folk culture, most of which is created in dialect. This further strengthens the uniqueness of opera genres. In order to survive, when opera is spread across dialect areas. It will also allow the singing to absorb the local dialect and the content of the local folk culture. This made the opera not only gain public recognition but also gave birth to a rich and unique opera culture. At the same time, opera was one of the few forms of entertainment for the public at that time, which further consolidated the literary and artistic status of opera. The prosperity of opera undoubtedly follows the law of cultural development.

The drama also declined. The most basic requirement for the survival of art is to have an audience who can understand it. Nowadays, the language used in people's daily lives is more and more Mandarin as the mainstream. The use of dialects is less and less, facing the dilemma of decline or even extinction. This makes it increasingly difficult for people to understand the opera that uses dialects. Local audiences may even find it incomprehensible without subtitles. From an artistic appreciation perspective, this is truly perplexing [3]. The rich entertainment methods such as film and television are constantly impacting on the status of opera, making it worried about decline.

It seems that the reform of opera urgently needs to conform to the law of cultural development, and language has an important influence on the expression of opera, so the reform of Mandarin should be listed as a priority. Even allowing the competition and exchange between operas is in line with the law of opera development.

The particularity of today's era changes the rationality of the above views. Since the reform and opening up, in the process of China's rapid development, Chinese society has experienced a profound and extensive change. This has profoundly broken the original cultural pattern of China and changed the living environment of traditional culture. The stability of traditional culture for thousands of years makes it difficult to adapt to such drastic changes. The development of traditional culture lags behind the environment of the times. If this phenomenon is left unchecked, the gap will become larger and larger until it forms a chasm between traditional culture and the times and even risks cultural disconnection. The linguistic dilemma of drama is one such example. The change continues, as China catches up with the times and works for national rejuvenation. In this process, the change of cultural environment will not stop, and it is still far away from the original environment of traditional culture. The development of the times requires the informatization of national language and writing. As the primary carrier of information, the standardization and regulation of language and text, as well as the norms and standards for linguistic information processing, are directly linked to the country's level of informatization and, consequently, impact China's international competitiveness [4]. The national language is shouldering more important tasks of the times, and the development of the times still needs the service of Mandarin. The promotion of Mandarin will not stop, nor will the transformation of dialects to Mandarin.

At the same time, under the influence of globalization, China's international environment is also changing. International competition is increasingly fierce. In the field of culture, cultural exchanges between countries are becoming more and more frequent. It even puts forward the idea of multiple unity for world culture. The concept of globalization versus localization came into being. It is embodied in the protection of local culture and the localization transformation of foreign culture. The idea of viewing culture as a resource has been put forward, and China attaches more importance to the value of traditional culture.

The characteristics of the times promoted the state's intervention in the natural development of traditional culture and also made the development of opera from a free state to a conscious state. It makes it possible to protect opera. Under the combined action of

historical regularity and the particularity of the times, the future of opera becomes complicated.

3 Historical laws and the evolution of the times

The historical law of the development of two cultures and the common role of the characteristics of the times make the future of opera face the following problems. The task of the age of opera gives rise to the rationality of the protection of opera and the irrationality of its development.

3.1 The protection of opera is reasonable

First of all, the cultural value of opera is rich enough. As one of the great achievements of traditional culture, opera not only has a variety of musical singing styles and dialects with their own characteristics but also has other rich cultural values. “Traditional Chinese opera is an essential component of Chinese civilization, integrating various art forms such as language, literature, music, dance, visual arts, martial arts, and acrobatics, thereby showcasing the unique charm of classical Chinese art.” In the process of development, opera has also absorbed a large number of excellent traditional cultures Huangmei Opera as an example—Hubei’s Huangmei tune, Jiangxi’s tea-picking opera, as well as local folk songs and popular literature from Anqing, have all played a significant role in shaping the artistic characteristics of Huangmei Opera [5]. This is determined by the characteristics of various art forms that are highly developed in traditional culture, which are interwoven with each other and integrated.

Secondly, the protection of opera is feasible. In the current situation of increasingly fierce cultural competition, the country attaches great importance to the development of traditional culture, which provides sufficient resources for the protection of opera. The revival of a country will inevitably bring about the prosperity of culture, and people's awareness and ability to protect traditional culture will also improve. This may bring good development opportunities for traditional culture such as opera. This means that state support will not permanently interfere with the natural development of culture.

Finally, in the process of opera development, theory lags behind practice. For a long time, although there have been theoretical works on opera, the coverage of the achievements of various genres is not perfect. At the same time, the development of opera generally has strong empirical characteristics in the process of traditional culture development, and lacks the summary of the achievements of opera rising to a theoretical height. The cultural value of opera has not been fully explored. The sorting and summarization of the development of opera will become important evidence for the continuity of Chinese culture.

3.2 The development of opera is unreasonable

If opera is to develop, it is inevitable that there will be reform and competition. In terms of language reform, the first manifestation is the particularity of opera in dialect culture.

Dialect carries many kinds of art, but opera is undoubtedly the one that is most bound to dialect among these arts. After thousands of years of development, opera has long been rid of the ignorance when it was just founded, and even has highly condensed theoretical achievements. The dialect has long been an inseparable part of the individuality of various opera genres. Dialect, vocal style, and opera genre are inherently integrated, and neither scriptwriting, musical composition nor vocal performance can deviate from this unity [6].

Therefore, to protect the personality of opera, dialects must also be protected. But at a time when dialects are declining, this is contrary to development.

It is also reflected in the convergence and singularity of the reform of the Mandarin opera language. Almost all dialects are converging on Mandarin, which means that the richness of the overall pronunciation of the language is decreasing. This makes it possible to make the language of opera close to Mandarin reform, which may promote the temporary prosperity of opera, but ultimately leads to the convergence of the dialect and singing style of opera. When all regional opera genres become artistically homogenized, the cultural function of identity recognition in local opera music will also disappear. Ultimately, this will lead to the loss of its audience as cultural bearers, the erosion of its survival space, and the eventual decline of traditional Chinese opera [7]. This reform will undoubtedly accelerate the demise of opera. This is different from the differentiation of dialect pronunciation before the implementation of Mandarin, which brought about the richness and development of singing. The phonetic change of dialect to Mandarin is not stable. To take another step back, it is not feasible to reform opera with a language that lies between Mandarin and dialect. Because the linguistic evolution of dialects to Mandarin has not stopped, so far no relatively stable language combines the universality of Mandarin and the characteristics of dialects. In the face of such linguistic instability, this kind of rash reform is likely to lead to the wrong direction of dramatic reform. Instead of promoting the development of opera, it will accelerate its demise. The internal and external environment of the opera also makes its development unreasonable.

It is also unrealistic to compete when opera is declining. Different dialects of different genres are closer to Mandarin, Internal competition will only select the opera genre that is closer to Mandarin in language and easier to retain personality in the transformation from dialect to Mandarin, And many plays with cultural personality are ignored. This kind of competition in the pull-off frame will only waste cultural personality. For example, the Peking dialect that constitutes the standard Mandarin carries Peking Opera, To some extent, because of this advantage, it is easier to adapt to language change, and it is still a prominent national drama genre.

It is also unrealistic to compete in cultural exchanges with foreign countries. Communication is based on equality. In the context of declining opera, opera has become a weak link in traditional culture. The foreign cultures that can be imported into China and can stand on their feet are often the relatively strong ones in cultural competition. The exchange and competition of opera are unequal, and there is a risk of cultural invasion, which further aggravates the loss and alienation of the personality of opera. At the very least, foreign cultures should be localized before they are tried to communicate.

The above reasons make the protection and development of opera equally important in the stage time. On July 18, 2018, the General Office of the State Council issued the 'Several Policies on Supporting the Inheritance and Development of Traditional Chinese Opera,' which clearly stated the guiding principle of 'persisting in both preserving and transcending inheritance, transformation, and innovation, with equal emphasis on protection, inheritance, and development.' [8].

3.3 The rationality of the development of opera and the irrationality of the protection status quo

In the long run, for a cultural form to survive, development is ultimately the first priority. Moreover, for opera, the essence of seeking the revitalization and development of opera is to seek survival space. Culture must be in line with the times so that it can have the soil to survive in the environment of the times, gain public recognition, and occupy a place in the culture of the times. Moreover, the state supports traditional culture in the hope that it can

play an important role in international cultural competition, rather than just to maintain its own survival. Culture has never existed in isolation. While dialect culture maintains its own unique characteristics, it must also be understood by other dialect cultures and even by different ethnic cultures around the world. This is a typical process of cross-cultural communication [9]. Moreover, development does not have to be manifested as competition but also can be manifested as cooperation.

The current situation of opera protection is unreasonable. Protecting opera is not in line with the law of cultural development. This is a special phase that can only be reflected with the support of national resources. Although there is an optimistic expectation for the future development of traditional culture, we should also be aware that this stage of vigorous protection of opera may not last long.

However, many genres of drama are fighting their own battles and sticking to their own ways under the national resource bias, and even to the extent of protecting dialects. Blind adherence will further widen the gap between opera art and the contemporary environment, and eventually make them completely disconnected from each other. On the contrary, it will aggravate the crisis of the extinction of opera in the future.

4 Discussion

First of all, we must realize that no matter whether opera is based on history or times, and whether it is protected or developed, it is difficult to return to the peak.

The goal of revitalizing the opera should be to survive through hard work. Because the dialect environment no longer exists, there are many kinds of dialects. It was caused by the inconvenient transportation between regions and the closed environment of that time. In today's globalized world, such an era no longer exists. The fundamental reason for the extinction of dialects is that the 'use' of these dialects has become increasingly limited [10]. It is difficult for the personality of the language to develop. At the same time, there are many more competitors in opera, and it is harder to restore its former status.

At the same time, the protection and development of opera should go hand in hand. The protection and development of opera are not subordinate, not antagonistic, but parallel. The protection is to protect the cultural value of opera so that opera and even traditional culture can be passed on. At the same time, it provides time and space for opera to connect with modernization. The development is to enrich the connotation of opera culture and explore the feasibility of integrating traditional culture with the contemporary environment. So protection and development are mutually supportive and should not be separated. But note. The protection should focus on the cultural attributes of opera, The development should pay attention to the social attributes of opera language. Protection and development are not the same.

The revitalization of opera should be based on the integrity of opera, so the revitalization of opera should be aimed at the public rather than the minority. Although opera has individual differences in form, connotation, and situation. But there is no difference between high and low opera genres, but different methods of protection. The cultural value contained in it is unique.

The decline of opera is a common problem faced by all genres, but the degree of impact is different. The decline cannot be improved by the development of some genres alone. Because opera is a culture for the masses, the volume of opera culture is very large. Only the overall progress of opera can make it occupy a place in the cultural environment of the times. Only in this way can the cultural value of opera be inherited and the revitalization of opera be realized.

We should realize the continuity of cultural laws and the stage characteristics of the times. In the face of the influence of the characteristics of the times on traditional culture, the

exploration of the revitalization of opera should have a global vision. And it's forward-looking. While attaching great importance to national assistance, we should also realize that such intervention in the laws of cultural development may not be permanent. Therefore, national resources should be used reasonably. At the same time, we should pay full attention to the role of the law of literary and artistic development, realize the importance of public recognition, and strive to keep in line with the environment of the times.

Hope for the future of cultural prosperity but not expect it. The future cultural Renaissance may, of course, provide a broad space for the development of traditional culture including opera with its inclusiveness, But we don't know exactly when the cultural renaissance will come. Therefore, we should base ourselves on the present and do a good job in the protection and development of opera. On the premise of retaining the personality of opera, we should actively respond to the historical law of cultural development and give opera a place in the present.

The theory and practice of the development of drama should not be separated. Theoretical research in the development of drama lags behind practice. To connect theory with practice, the empirical experience of opera inheritance makes the academic circle lack of theoretical development of past opera achievements,

These achievements should be preserved theoretically. At the same time, theoretical research should be carried out on the new exploration of opera in contemporary times.

The theory and practice of the development of opera should be synchronized as soon as possible. At the same time, the theoretical research of opera should be based on the development context of opera, and should not lose the overall direction of research because of some prominent aspects in the development of opera, to put the end before the beginning.

There are still some specific plans for the protection and development of opera at present First of all, the relative stability stage of the evolution from dialect to Mandarin language is made into a play reform

While Mandarin influences dialects, dialects also influence Mandarin. Although the current dialect pronunciation is constantly converging to Mandarin, the dialect has been long inherited and widely used, Dialects still have a strong power. When they converge to a certain extent, dialects will be in a stage of confrontation with Mandarin and a relatively stable state will appear. This kind of language has the fluidity of Mandarin but also retains the most characteristic content of dialect under the elimination of Mandarin. This relatively stable language state will provide a good basis for the reform of the opera language.

Secondly, the whole process of creation should be constructed theoretically and the advantages of national support should be brought into play.

In the past, the creators of opera singing passed on their knowledge from teacher to student or learned by word of mouth when learning opera, Both reflect an empirical tendency, and many opera genres lack theoretical norms. This was due to the limitations of traditional cultural development at that time, but now state support makes it possible for various opera genres to elevate their experience and achievements to a theoretical height. It is of great significance to extract a systematic theoretical paradigm for the performance, creation, and transmission of each opera genre. At the same time, the whole process of opera protection and development is digitized based on instability. The language environment of opera is unstable, and the times are also developing rapidly, In this case, the traditional opera is on the way to decline or even extinction, so it is urgent to protect the data of the original opera achievements. It is also easy for the developing opera to go astray, and the discovery of such problems is relatively delayed, No one can say which part of the past reform will go wrong. Therefore, The whole process of opera reform should be digitally retained so that opera has room for reversal when it goes astray. This move also preserves all the cultural achievements in the development of opera. It not only guarantees the development of drama but also enriches the cultural value of opera.

Attention should also be paid to the communication with adjacent operas, which can not only communicate but also reduce the loss of individuality. It can facilitate exchanges and mutual learning between operas with similar characteristics, and help each other stay warm. In the protection of the original opera personality, they can interfere with each other; in the improvement and development of the opera, they can communicate information. We can share the fruits of our development and learn from each other. It can reduce the risk of personality loss caused by the independent development of opera. But this does not mean that these operas should go up and down together.

Other opera features that have nothing to do with dialects should be communicated as far as possible

Opera is one of the great achievements of Chinese traditional culture. Although dialect and singing are the personality of opera, the composition of opera art is very rich. The development of all the characteristics of opera should not be stopped because of the dilemma of the personality of opera. Some characteristics that have nothing to do with the personality of opera can be exchanged and borrowed from other operas, other traditional cultures, or even contemporary popular culture. It is a kind of enrichment and development for the connotation of each culture. Even if these characteristics of opera develop into an excellent culture that is loved and recognized by people, it is possible to arouse attention and learn about opera language. Just as the love of Hong Kong dramas led to people's study of Cantonese. But this is the way of thinking about opera development. In the end, it should serve the opera itself, rather than let each feature of the opera go out separately. Because it will cause a loss of the integrity of the structure and cultural value of opera.

In the future, when Mandarin is basically universal, people can master Mandarin on the basis of mastering it. On the premise that people are interested in and willing to use dialect culture, The other side's dialect environment is consciously preserved in the form of "dialect corner" and "dialect island". Let traditional culture, such as opera, have a natural environment in which it can survive. Enough time and space should be reserved for the modernization adaptation of traditional culture.

5 Conclusion

This paper believes that in the current situation where cultural laws and characteristics of the times jointly influence the development of opera culture, we should recognize the difficulties in the revitalization process of opera. We should base ourselves on the present, make full use of the advantages of state support, and focus on the overall development of opera, giving equal importance to protection and development. It takes into account the tasks of the times and the laws of cultural development, and synchronizes the theory and practice of opera. And put forward the specific reform plan at present. This study not only makes a profound discussion on the problems of opera, It also has reference significance for solving the problems of dialect culture at the higher level of opera and even traditional culture at the higher level.

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